L to R: **Tomoe Otsu**, her mother, **Yoshino Otsu**, and family friend **Sugino Ushijima** at the Ushijima farm in **Centerville**. Photo by **Dorothea Lange**, May 9, 1942. Lange is one of America's foremost photo documentarians, although she was very disappointed with her photos of the evacuation. "I fear the intolerance and prejudice is constantly growing," Lange said. "We have a disease. It's Jap-baiting and hatred. I went through an experience I'll never forget when I was working on it and learned a lot, even if I accomplished nothing." Lange hoped her photos would have an impact on the public's perception of the Japanese, but they did not. • *Photo above and quote from Lange, courtesy Densho.org.*

RECONSTRUCTING

Dorothea Lange, the JACL & the Japanese in Centerville #1

The Otsus (seen at left) were from Alameda, CA and came to Centerville/Niles* in hopes of avoiding the World War II evacuation of the Japanese following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. **Sugino Ushijima** had originally lived in Alameda but moved to Centerville (in the Washington Township) around 1920.

On **February 9, 1942,** Tomoe Otsu wrote in her diary: *"I wrote to Mrs. Ushijima in Niles asking for a favor. We may end up staying there. If possible, I would like to be near where Susumu-san** is. The rain continues to fall. It seems to be tears of sympathy for the Japanese in Alameda."*

On **May 9, Lange photographed** the Township Japanese as they were being evacuated on buses to Tanforan. But it's possible the photo at left was Lange's first of the day, given the overcast light and that the first buses were leaving at 8:30am (later that morning it was sunny).

Lange may have contacted the Washington Township JACL*** in advance to make this picture, which is clearly posed. The Ushijima house at RFD 371 (rural free delivery) was nearly two miles from the JACL where Lange made virtually all her other photos that day.

Did **Lange then give the trio a ride** to the JACL? There is nothing about it in her caption for this image, but she may have done so. Why not?

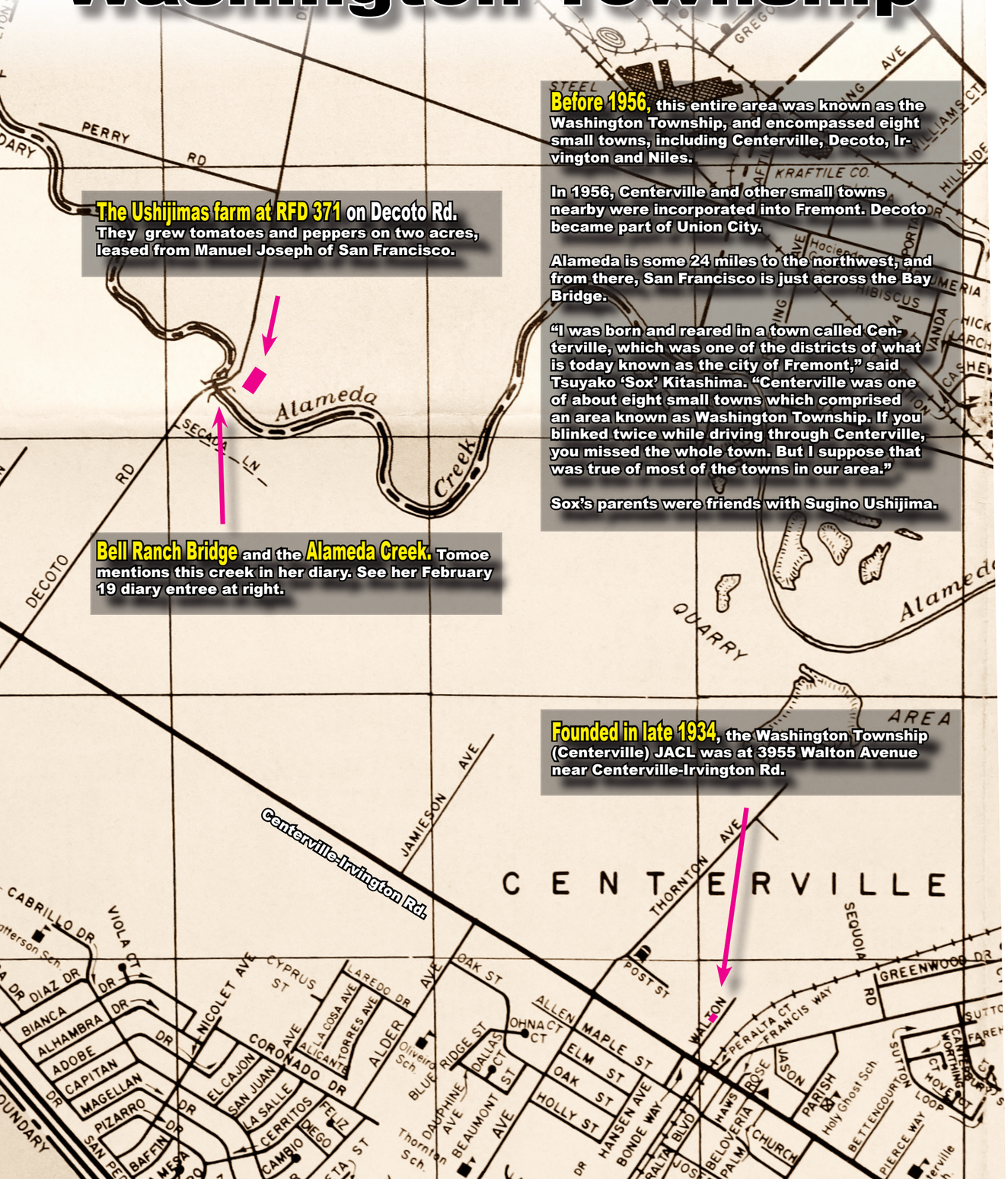
**Today, Centerville is Fremont, CA.*
***Susumu Tomine would soon become Tomoe's husband. They were married in Tanforan just before they were sent to be incarcerated in Topaz, Utah.*
**** Japanese American Citizens League*

Before they board their buses to Tanforan, Bekins trucks are loaded with the luggage from the Washington Township Japanese. The building in the background is the Williams Brothers packing house, which was just across the dirt lot from the Township JACL building.

Lange photo May 9, 1942

Tomoe and her mother, Yoshino, move in with the Ushijimas in February 1942

Washington Township



Before 1956, this entire area was known as the Washington Township, and encompassed eight small towns, including Centerville, Decoto, Irvington and Niles.

In 1956, Centerville and other small towns nearby were incorporated into Fremont. Decoto became part of Union City.

Alameda is some 24 miles to the northwest, and from there, San Francisco is just across the Bay Bridge.

"I was born and reared in a town called Centerville, which was one of the districts of what is today known as the city of Fremont," said Tsuyako 'Sox' Kitashima. "Centerville was one of about eight small towns which comprised an area known as Washington Township. If you blinked twice while driving through Centerville, you missed the whole town. But I suppose that was true of most of the towns in our area."

Sox's parents were friends with Sugino Ushijima.

The Ushijimas farm at RFD 371 on Decoto Rd. They grew tomatoes and peppers on two acres, leased from Manuel Joseph of San Francisco.

Bell Ranch Bridge and the **Alameda Creek.** Tomoe mentions this creek in her diary. See her February 19 diary entree at right.

Founded in late 1934, the Washington Township (Centerville) JACL was at 3955 Walton Avenue near Centerville-Irvington Rd.

Farm is near: Decoto
Location: Decoto Road near Bell Ranch Bridge
County: Alameda State: California
Tenure: Rent Total no. acreage 2
Type of soil: Sandy

Registrant's name: Ushijima, George
Mailing address: Rt. 1 Box 371; Niles, Calif.
State: California
Age: 21 Citizen status: American

Crops growing: Tomato plants Acreage: 1¾
Pepper plants ¼
Miscellaneous plants 1 bed

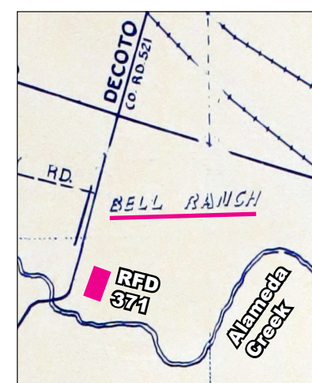
Progresses: Transplanting Value: $900.00
growing $350.-00
growing $50.00

Structures on farm: house, garage, wood shed, and 2-room building, and tomato beds.
Tools and equipment available: tomato equipment--hoes, rakes, etc.

A number of documents were needed to locate Sugino Ushijima's farm, but the most definitive is George Ushijima (above) listing the location as "near Bell Ranch Bridge" (at left) while also stating their mailing address was at Rt. 1 Box 371.

RFD delivery became popular in America so that farmers and rural residents did not have to drive into town to get their mail. It was also easier for the post office, they could often deliver to a roadside mailbox instead of driving to farmhouses located some distance from the road.

"About the porch number 371 and rural route 371 (photo front page), these are probably one and the same," said Curator Lynn Heidelbaugh of the *Smithsonian National Postal Museum* in Washington D.C. "The numbering of residences on rural routes has been a modern development, largely due to the need for 911 emergency services mapping, which has resulted in the movement to assign individual numbers to rural residences in the 1990s-2000s."



The area known as Bell Ranch was originally owned by James Hawley, who hung a mission style bell from a tree hanging over the Alameda Creek in 1852. "The bridge which now spans Alameda Creek on the Decoto-Alvarado Road has been marked as *The Bell Ranch Bridge*," wrote John Sandoval, author of *The History of Washington Township.*

From Tomoe Otsu's 1942 diary:

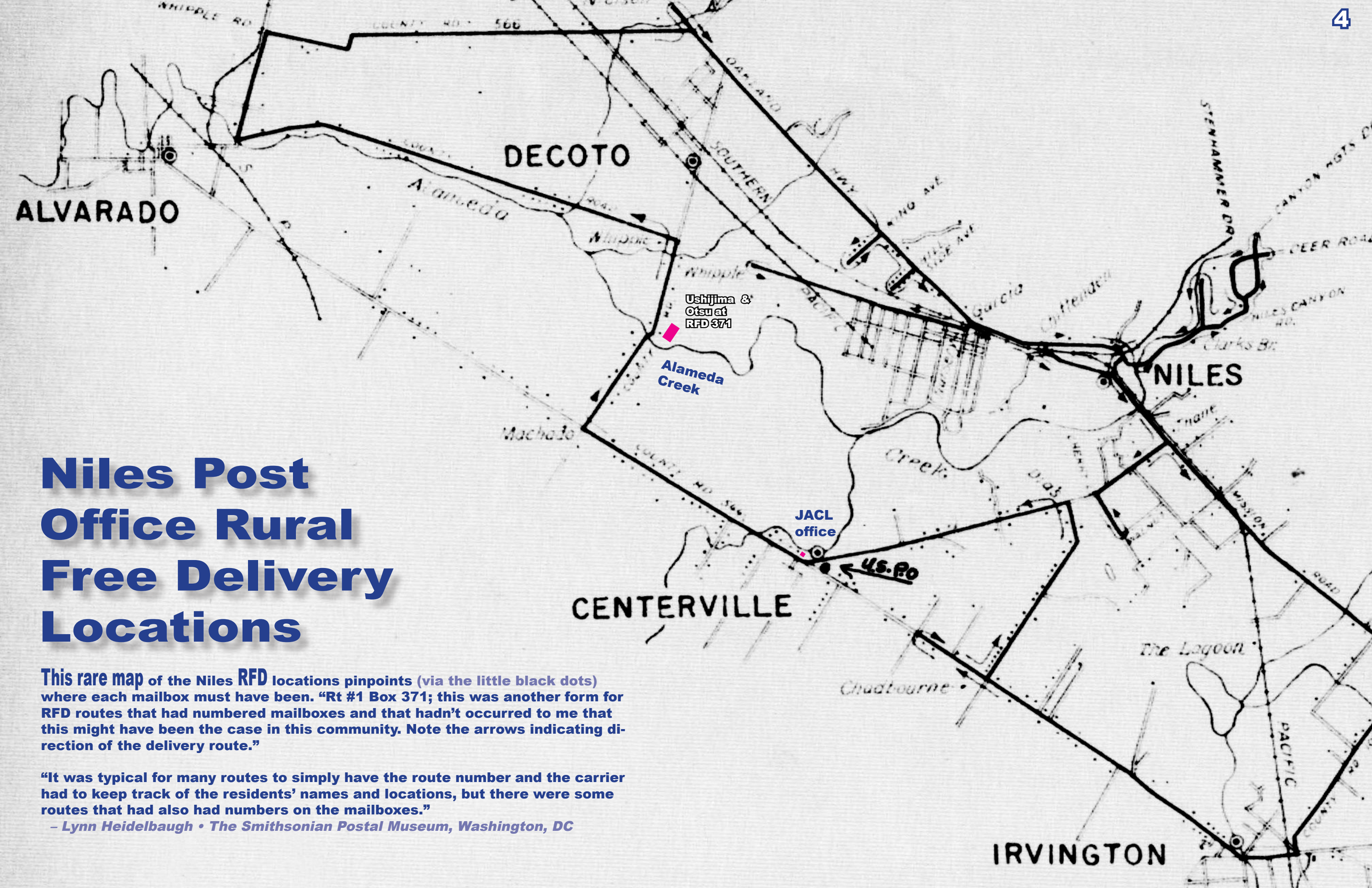
February 10 "We received a kind letter from Mrs. Ushijima, urging us to come over there as soon as possible. We decided to go to Niles* at last."

February 19: "When I said goodbye to many people and left beloved Alameda, tears I had been holding back oozed out. It was past 3 o'clock when we arrived at the new home by a truck. Mrs. Ushijima, working in the field, came out to greet us. Though the (Ushijima) house is in the country, it is much nicer than my house. It is built in a country house style and looks very cozy. The view from the back window is refreshing with a stream flowing below."

Tomoe is referring to the Alameda Creek.

**Tomoe often refers to Niles, which is the next town to the northeast of Centerville. She does so because Rt 1, Box 371 is along the RFD route delivered by the Niles Post Office. Centerville had a post office, but they did not deliver to RFDs. The Ushijima farm is actually located between Centerville and Decoto (which is just to the north of the farm and unseen in the map at left).*
See next page.

Niles Post Office Rural Free Delivery Locations



This rare map of the Niles RFD locations pinpoints (via the little black dots) where each mailbox must have been. "Rt #1 Box 371; this was another form for RFD routes that had numbered mailboxes and that hadn't occurred to me that this might have been the case in this community. Note the arrows indicating direction of the delivery route."

"It was typical for many routes to simply have the route number and the carrier had to keep track of the residents' names and locations, but there were some routes that had also had numbers on the mailboxes."

– Lynn Heidelbaugh • The Smithsonian Postal Museum, Washington, DC

The Township JACL at 3955 Walton Ave.

This building is still standing as of 2023. Walton has disappeared and this house is now addressed at 3810 Bonde Way in Fremont, CA.

Of the 550 total Japanese, nearly 100% of the 150 adult Niseis in the Township were members of the JACL by 1942, an extraordinarily high percentage compared to most Japanese communities. The Japanese represented four percent of the entire Township's population at that time.

Information courtesy Bill Helfman: Author of ***Sun Rising in the Eastern Sky: Japanese Americans in Washington Township, 1920-1942.***

Lange photo May 9, 1942

Otsu & Ushijima
Washington Township JACL Evacuee Reports
& documents from 1942

EVACUEE REPORT

	NAME	AGE	REGISTRATION NUMBER
1.			
2.	Yoshino Otsu	50	1794783
3.	Tomoe Otsu	24	
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

The Otsus former address in Alameda

FROM — Town-Country: Alameda, Alameda County — Address: 1630½ Park Street

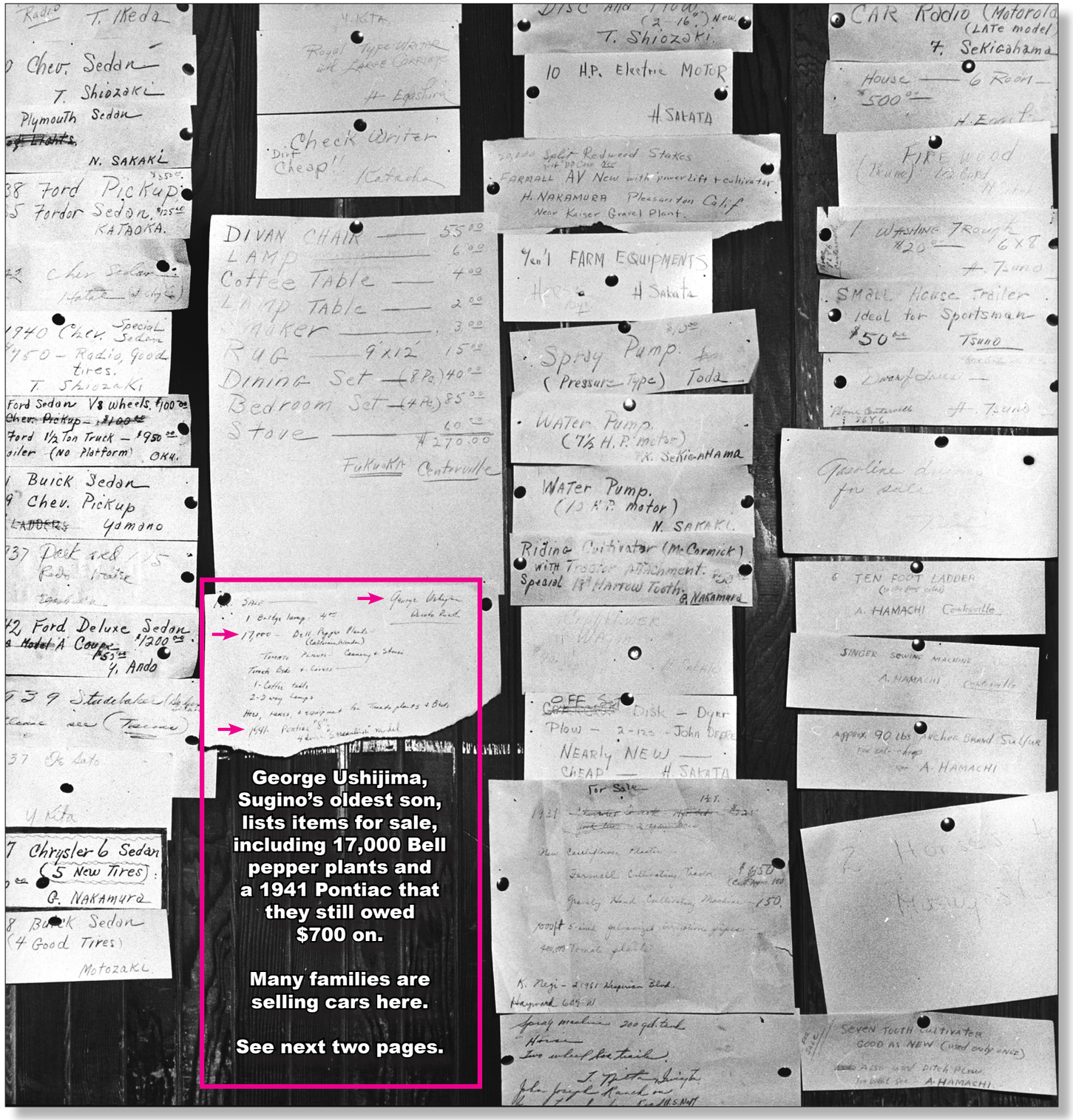
TO — Town: Niles, Alameda County — Address: Rt. 1 Box 371 — Key number: K-12-111

The Otsus address in the Township

FAMILY NAME Ushijima NUMBER IN FAMILY 4

NAME	AGE	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	M.C. NO. OR SCHOOL GRADE
Sugino	54	Jan. 17, 1888	Kitagawachi Japan	2460734
George	21	Feb. 22, 1921	Centerville	
Harry Ushijima	19	Aug. 22, 1923	Centerville	
James	12	May 11, 1930	Centerville	Centerville Elementary School Sixth grade

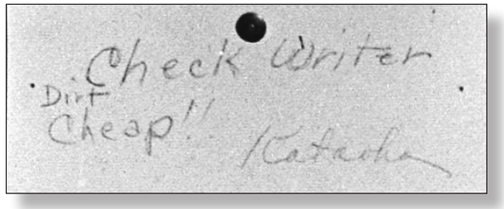
Sugino's husband, Seisuke is not listed here, as he had died in 1939. Oldest son George Ushijima ran the family farm in Centerville (see next three pages).



George Ushijima, Sugino's oldest son, lists items for sale, including 17,000 Bell pepper plants and a 1941 Pontiac that they still owed $700 on.

Many families are selling cars here.

See next two pages.



Lange photographs a wall with advertisements inside the JACL office. While some of these advertisements could have been on the wall from before the war began, it is likely that they are mostly from Japanese selling their farm equipment, furniture, cars and in one case, a house, due to the impending evacuation.

Many Township names appear here:
Y. Ando
H. Egoshima (Egoshira?)
Hyoji Fukuoka
Arajiro & Yone Hamachi
Hatae
T. Ikeda
Yumi Kataoka
Y. Kita
Motozaki
George Nakamura
H. Nakamura (Pleasanton)
K. Negi (Hayward)
T. Niita
Oku
Sakaki
Harry Sakata (JACL treasurer)
K. Sekigahama
T. Shiozaki
Toda
Akira Tsuno
George Ushijima
Yamano

Lange photo May 9, 1942

Chev. Sedan
T. Shiozaki

Plymouth Sedan
~~of Lights~~
N. SAKAKI

38 Ford Pick U
35 Fordor Sedan
KATAOKA.

Chev Sedan
Matsue

1940 Chev. Special Sedan
$450 – Radio, good tires.
T. Shiozaki

7 Chrysler 6 Sedan
(5 New Tires)
G. NAKAMURA

8 Buick Sedan
(4 Good Tires)
Motozaki

~~Cultivator~~ Disk – Dyer
Plow – 2-12s – John Deere
NEARLY NEW
CHEAP – H. SAKATA

Seven Tooth Cultivator
GOOD AS NEW (used only once)
Also used Ditch Plow
for Quick Sale – A. HAMACHI

Radio T. Ikeda

SALE
George Ushijima
Dinuba Road

1 Bridge lamp $4.00
17,000 – Bell Pepper Plants
(California Wonder)
Tomato Plants – Cannery & Stake
Trench Beds & Covers
1 – Coffee table
2-3 way Lamps
Hoes, rakes, & equipment for Tomato plants & Beds
1941 Pontiac "8"
4 door Streamline model

42 Ford Deluxe Sedan
~~& Model A~~ Coupe $1200.00
$550.00
Y. Ando

Spray Pump.
(Pressure Type) Toda

WATER Pump.
(7½ H.P. motor)
T.K. Sekigahama

WATER Pump.
(10 H.P. motor)
N. SAKAKI

Riding Cultivator (McCormick)
WITH Tractor Attachment.
Special 18" Harrow Tooth.
G. NAKAMURA

Lange photo May 9, 1942

1 WASHING Trough
$20.00 – 6x8
T. Tsuno

SMALL House Trailer
Ideal for Sportsman
$50.00 Tsuno

House – 6 Room
$500.00
H. Eoshi

Township JACL Property Surveys from 1942

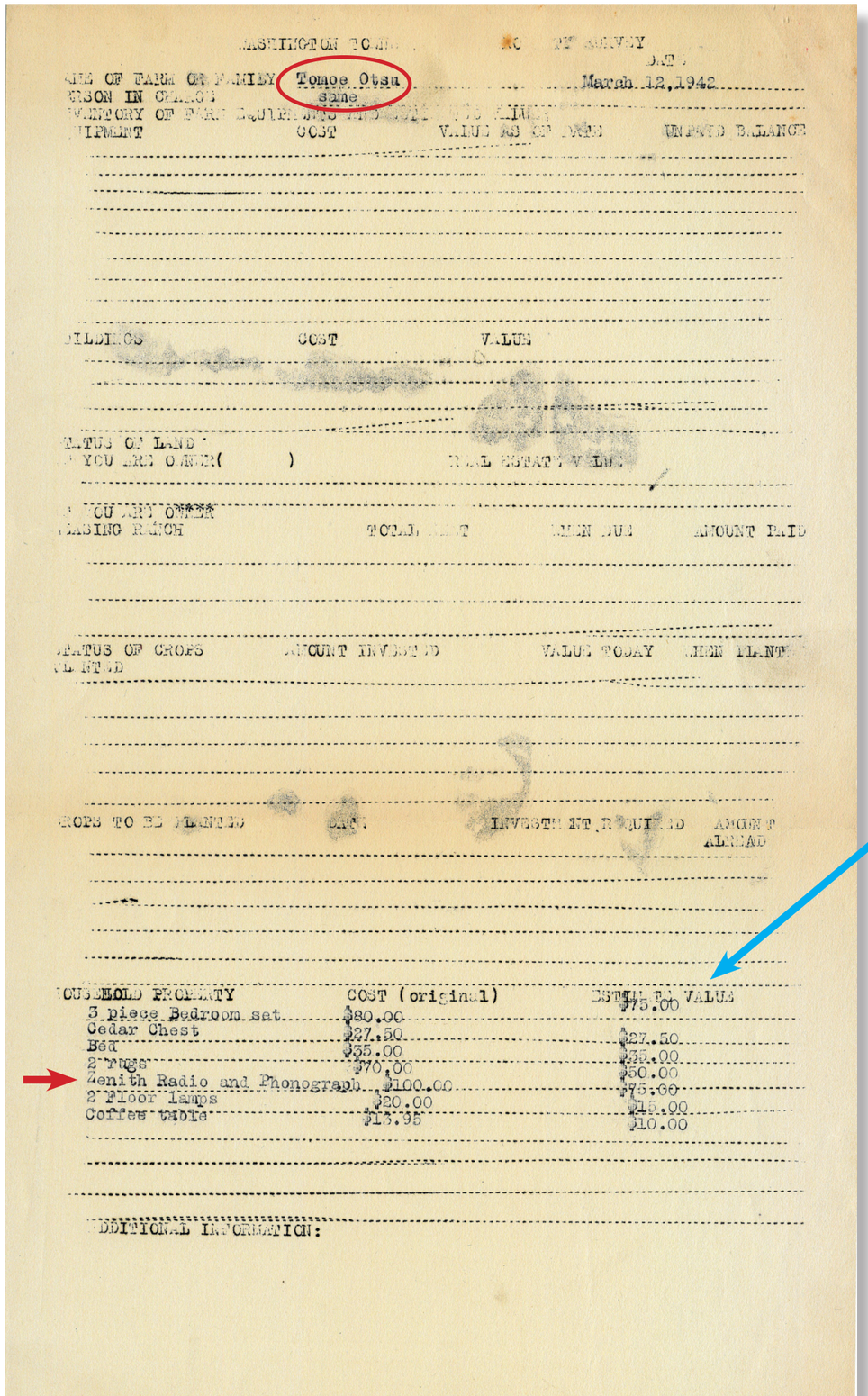
The Washington Township JACL kept meticulous documents about their members. All JACL families filled out this form, describing the value of their property. The items on these family documents varies from farm equipment to kitchen and household items, to cars and tractors.

Tomoe Otsu (left) lists the family's worldly possessions, which cost $346.45. A Zenith radio and phonograph were the most expensive.

Sometimes they inform us as to the state of mind of the Japanese. George Ushijima (right) assumes he will sell his tomato and pepper plants by the end of May 1942.

It's doubtful he was able to do so, as all the Washington Township Japanese would board their bus on May 9 to go to Tanforan.

JACL documents courtesy of the Fremont JACL and Alan Mikuni (in 2023, the Fremont JACL disbanded).



WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP JACL PROPERTY SURVEY

DATE

NAME OF FARM OR FAMILY Tomoe Otsu

PERSON IN CHARGE same

March 12,1942

INVENTORY OF FARM EQUIPMENTS AND ESTIMATE VALUE:

EQUIPMENT	COST	VALUE AS OF DATE	UNPAID BALANCE

BUILDINGS	COST	VALUE

STATUS OF LAND

IF YOU ARE OWNER( ) REAL ESTATE VALUE

IF YOU ARE OTHER

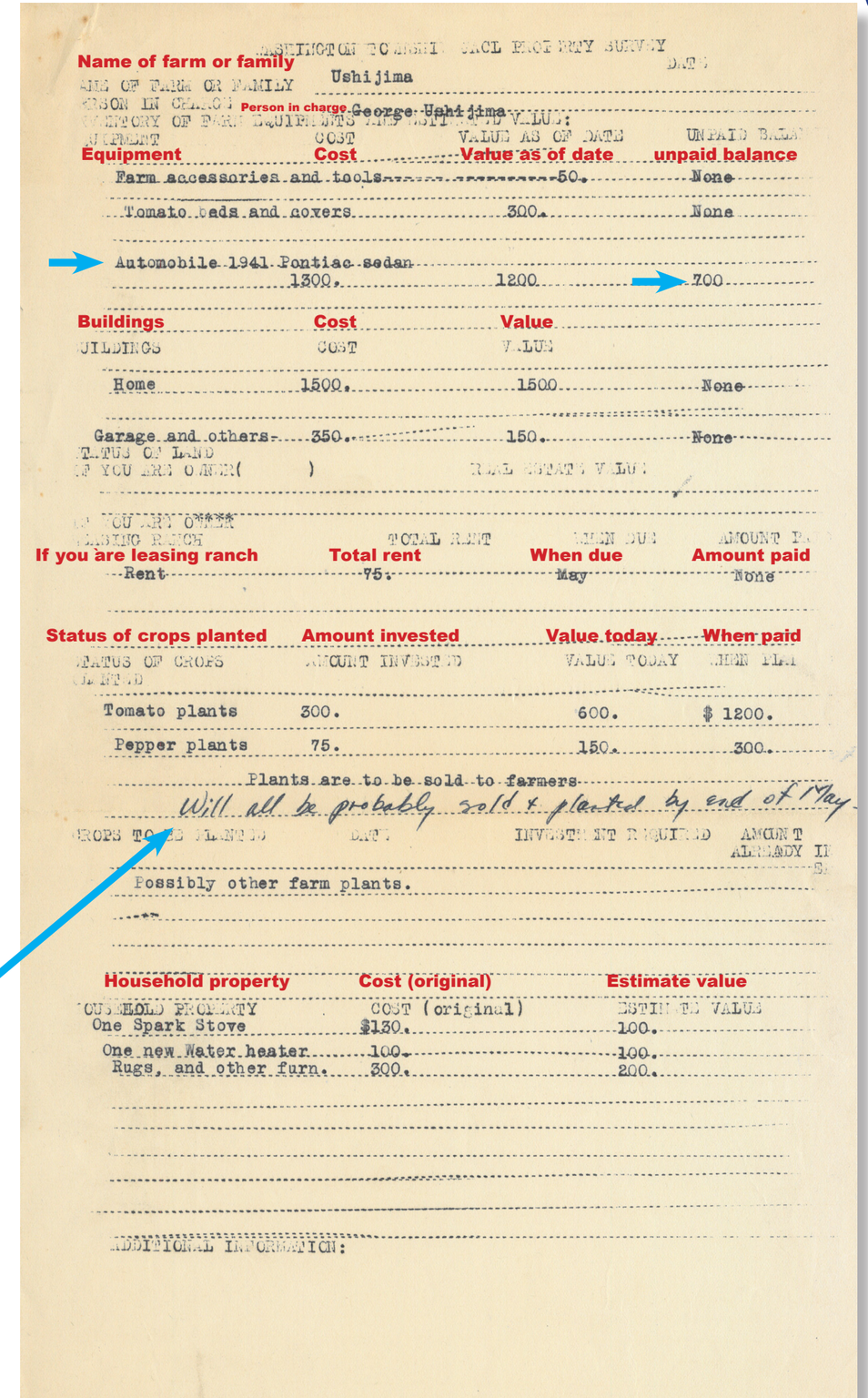
LEASING RANCH	TOTAL RENT	WHEN DUE	AMOUNT PAID

STATUS OF CROPS PLANTED	AMOUNT INVESTED	VALUE TODAY	WHEN PLANTED

CROPS TO BE PLANTED	DATE	INVESTMENT REQUIRED	AMOUNT ALREADY

HOUSEHOLD PROPERTY	COST (original)	ESTIMATE VALUE
3 piece Bedroom set	$80.00	$75.00
Cedar Chest	$27.50	$27.50
Bed	$35.00	$35.00
2 rugs	$70.00	$50.00
Zenith Radio and Phonograph	$100.00	$75.00
2 Floor lamps	$20.00	$15.00
Coffee table	$13.95	$10.00

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:



WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP JACL PROPERTY SURVEY

DATE

NAME OF FARM OR FAMILY Ushijima

PERSON IN CHARGE George Ushijima

INVENTORY OF FARM EQUIPMENTS AND ESTIMATE VALUE:

EQUIPMENT	COST	VALUE AS OF DATE	UNPAID BALANCE
Farm accessories and tools		50.	None
Tomato beds and covers		300.	None
Automobile 1941 Pontiac sedan	1300.	1200	700

BUILDINGS	COST	VALUE
Home	1500.	1500	None
Garage and others	350.	150.	None

STATUS OF LAND

IF YOU ARE OWNER( ) REAL ESTATE VALUE

IF YOU ARE OTHER

LEASING RANCH	TOTAL RENT	WHEN DUE	AMOUNT PAID
Rent	75.	May	None

STATUS OF CROPS PLANTED	AMOUNT INVESTED	VALUE TODAY	WHEN PLANTED
Tomato plants	300.	600.	$ 1200.
Pepper plants	75.	150.	300.

Plants are to be sold to farmers

Will all be probably sold & planted by end of May

CROPS TO BE PLANTED DATE INVESTMENT REQUIRED AMOUNT ALREADY IN

Possibly other farm plants.

HOUSEHOLD PROPERTY	COST (original)	ESTIMATE VALUE
One Spark Stove	$130.	100.
One new Water heater	100.	100.
Rugs, and other furn.	300.	200.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

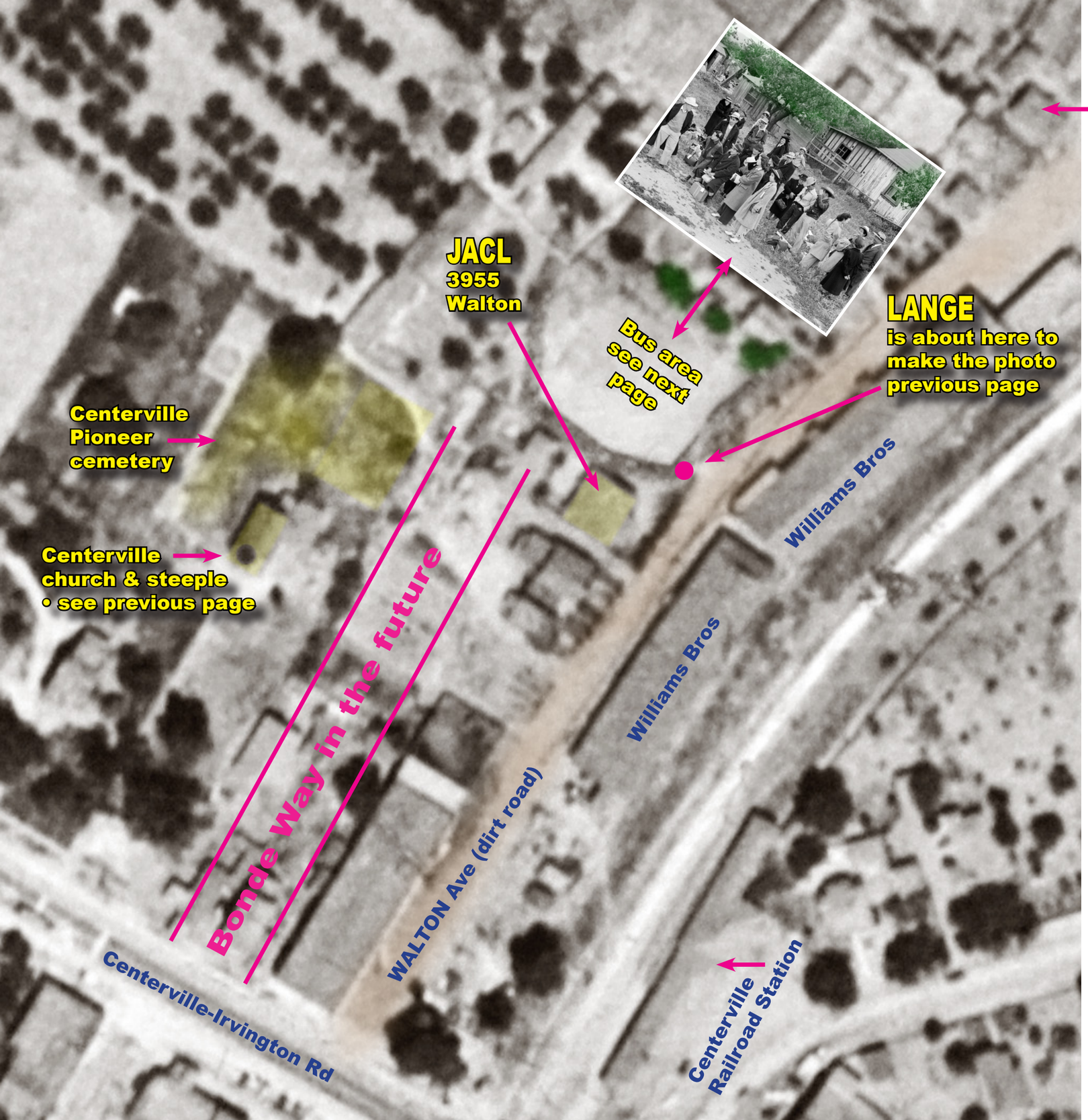
Washington Township JACL building • May 9, 1942

This side of the JACL faces Walton Ave (a dirt road) and the Williams Brothers buildings. The Centerville train station is further across Walton and unseen to the left.

Centerville Presbyterian church & cemetery

Seen for the first time is the entirety of the JACL building, **in this composite made from three of Lange's images**. The composite is the only way to see the entire building and Walton Ave. The images at left and right were taken under overcast skies, likely earlier in the morning. The middle section was shot in sunshine (note the shadows) later that morning. Some portions of the three images were left unaltered. The first set of buses were scheduled to leave at 8:30am, the second set at 10:30am... but probably left closer to 11am, according to Sachi Fudenna, who was on one of those buses.

See next page.



Perhaps the reason why the JACL office was located on Walton Road is that a number of Japanese were living there, per the 1940 census:

Albert and Kei Shimizu

Keiyumon and Hana Oku

Keichi and Yukio Isoda

Fusachi and Oki Inouye

Bango and Ukino Yukawa

Kumadoro Konda and son Harry

Harry and Kiwaye Sakauye

Miyamura and Kome Masakichi (?Last name spelling?)

Living nearby on Main street: William W. and Florence Walton.

This 1939 aerial photo depicts the locations of many of the elements visible in Lange's photo (previous page), including the approximate place she must have been to take the photo.

Bonde Way, on the east side of Centerville-Irvington Rd does not exist in this time, but eventually Walton Ave disappears and Bonde is built sometimes after 1968 on the east side (see at left). The JACL address at 3955 Walton then becomes 3810 Bonde Way and is a home, not an office.

In 1995, the Centerville railroad station was relocated to where the Williams Bros packing sheds can be seen in this photo. The station was restored soon after and appears much as it did in 1910.

The Centerville Presbyterian Church stood empty for decades when it burned in 1994. It is now an apartment complex. The church cemetery still exists.

Archie Uchiyama, 22

Harry Ushijima, 19
Sugino's son

Sugino Ushijima, 55
• see pages 1, 3, 6 & 9

George Ushijima, 22
Sugino's son
• see pages 6 & 9

Jimmy Ushijima, 12
Sugino's son

Lumiko Uchiyama, 15
Archie's sister
• real name Rumiko

Just yards to the northeast of the JACL building is a dirt lot where some Japanese waited for their buses (see previous page). Behind this group are some of the homes where Japanese families lived.

Bekins trucks are parked at one of the two Williams Bros packing houses that existed in this time (see page 2).

"The Japanese Americans did not resent her photographing them. They felt that in her they had a friend, and upon their release from the camps, many came to visit her."

Milton Meltzer, author of Dorothea Lange: A Photographer's Life

To learn much more about Lange, click on:

- **Densho Encyclopedia**
- **Densho Digital Repository of Lange's images**
- **Oakland Museum**

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Kelsey Camello: President of the Washington Township Museum of Local History in Fremont, CA. Information about RFD routes, the Washington Township, photos, documents, Bonde Way and much more!
Jane Carr: Reference librarian at the Fremont Library.
Caroline Davis: Centerville Librarian. Wash Township information.
Bill Helfman: Author of *Sun Rising in the Eastern Sky: Japanese Americans in Washington Township, 1920-1942.* Information on the Township and the JACL.
Kayanne Lam: City of Fremont: She located the 3955 Walton address of the JACL office. Thanks!
Jenny Lynch: Historian and Corporate Information Services Manager, the United States Postal Service. RFD info.
Linda Gordon and Gary Y. Okihiro: Editors of the book *Impounded*, which documents Dorothea Lange and her photographs. Also, thanks to Gary for indulging me on some of Lange's photos.
Stuart Guedon: Archeologist and Historic Geographer, Basin Research Associates and volunteer at the Washington Township Museum. Assistance with the Walton/Bonde neighborhood, maps, photos and much general expertise.
Amy Tomine, Naomi Tomine Ellis and Eugene Tomine: Access to Tomoe Otsu Tomine's 1942 diary. Her diary is also freely available as a PDF to download and read.
Mara Williams and Irving Williams, for help locating the Williams Bros packing sheds.

To learn more about the Alameda Japanese, at Densho, click here.

To see all the 1942 Washington Township JACL documents at Densho, click here to see many Township families represented.

At left: Lange had no issues hand holding her bulky, five lbs Graflex D series camera while climbing atop a car. She did so in style. Are those Chuck Taylor (Converse) All Stars she is wearing?

https://www.loc.gov/item/2017759800/

ALAMEDA
Japanese
American
HISTORY PROJECT